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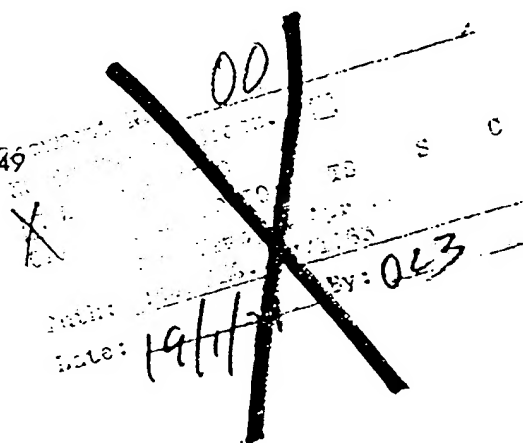
# THE CARIBBEAN LEGION

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
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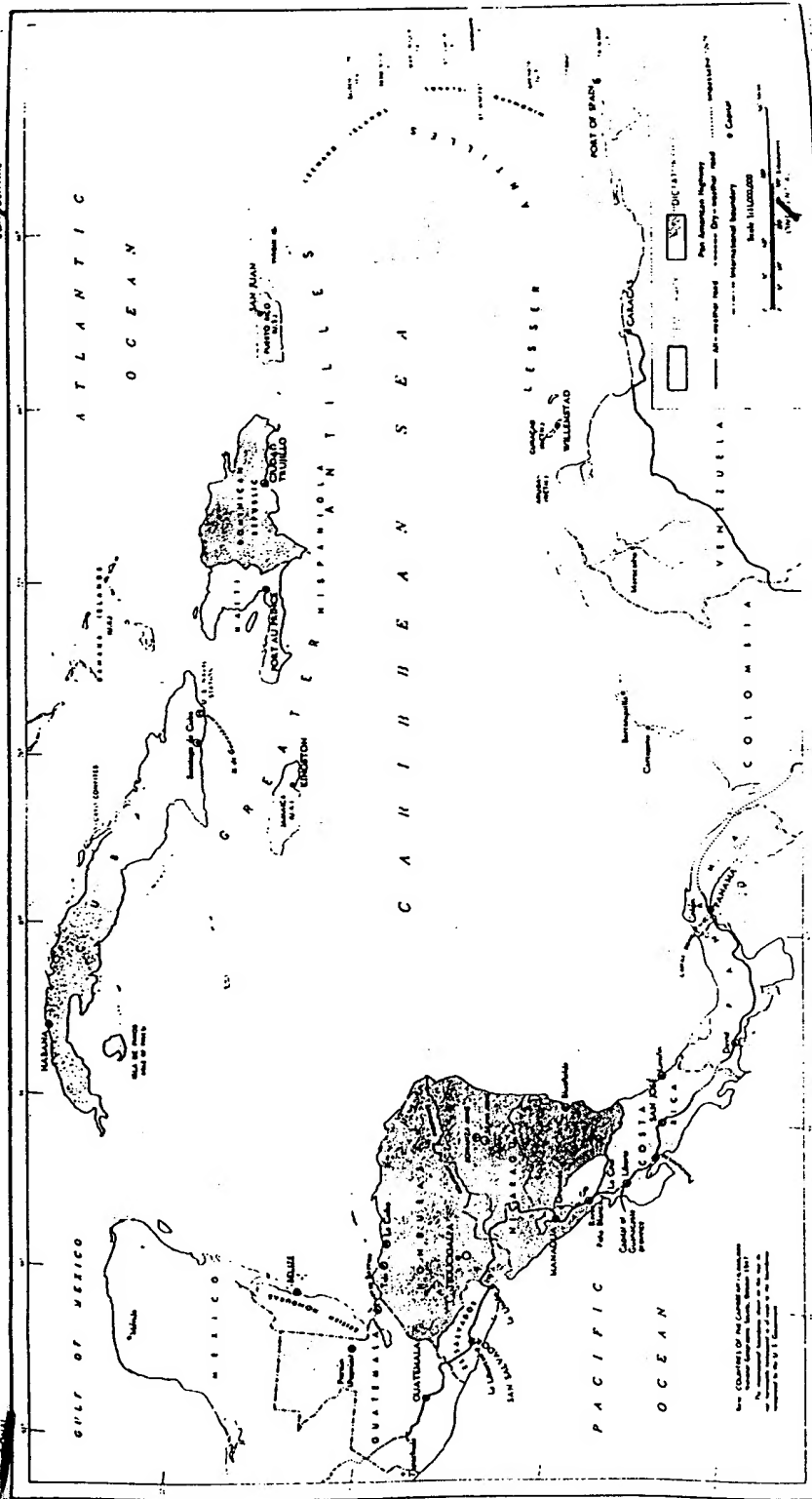
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# CENTRAL AMERICA-CARIBBEAN AREA

CONFIDENTIAL



## THE CARIBBEAN LEGION

## SUMMARY

The Caribbean Legion, an irregular military group of several hundred exiles, well-armed by Central American-Caribbean standards, has for some time exercised a considerable influence on the international relationships of the area. It has played a part in conspiracies against the Nicaraguan Government and was a deciding factor in the 1948 Costa Rican civil war. In relation to the countries within which it operates, the Legion is a sufficient force to be a significant factor in the calculations of their governments relating to area foreign policy.

At present, this group is primarily motivated by a common desire for the overthrow of the so-called "dictatorships"—especially Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. It is therefore aligned with and has become a clandestine instrument of public policy for the "democracies," particularly Cuba, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. The Legion as such has, however, nothing like a clearly defined ideology, and might contribute to the establishment of governments as dictatorial as those which it now seeks to destroy.

Public pressure, such as that resulting from the advice of the Council of Organization of American States (COAS) in December 1948 that Costa Rica remove from its territory "groups of nationals of foreign military organizations," may force public disavowal of the Legion upon the "democracies" which in turn may force the Legion into a temporarily passive role. Since, however, it has no real opposition among the "democracies" in which it is based except from those who either resist change in existing political relations or object to the use of force as an instrument of public policy, it is highly improbable that the group will be actually disbanded. At the present moment the Legion is quiescent and handicapped by disunity, but it may become more active at some future and more propitious time as a vigorous and significant force in Central American-Caribbean intergovernmental relationships.

Note: This report has been concurred in by the intelligence organizations of the Departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; for a dissent of the Intelligence Organization of the Department of State, see Enclosure A, p. 8. The report is based on information available to CIA on 25 February 1949.

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## THE CARIBBEAN LEGION

The presence in the Central American-Caribbean area of the self-styled "Caribbean Legion" is a highly significant factor for change and consequent uncertainty in area intergovernmental relationships. At the present time, the republics in the area tend to group themselves into two rival and competing blocs of power (see accompanying map) with Cuba, Guatemala, Costa Rica (and now possibly El Salvador), the so-called "democracies," in opposition to the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and, to a lesser extent, Honduras, the so-called "dictatorships." Haiti's traditional rivalry with the Dominican Republic makes its attempts to remain neutral difficult.

The aim of the Caribbean Legion coincides with that of the "democracies" in a common hostility to the existing governments of the "dictatorships." As a result, an informal but nonetheless intimate political and military relationship has developed between the two, and the Legion has become a clandestine and important instrument through which the "democracies" are pursuing their anti-"dictatorship" policy.

The planned invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1947 by the organization which later became known as the Legion was frustrated only when certain Cuban officials temporarily confiscated its arms; its action was decisive in the 1948 Costa Rican civil war when it joined in the conflict in order to weaken the Somoza Government of Nicaragua; it is in a position to influence the foreign policies of Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Cuba; and it is still determined to destroy the present regimes in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic against which it has already engaged in several conspiracies. Though it is at present somewhat divided and quiescent, it can and undoubtedly will become more active at any opportune moment, ready to promote its designs against the "dictators." In any case, an understanding of the organization and potentialities of the Caribbean Legion is essential to a forecast of many developments in the Caribbean area.

There is, at present, no evidence to demonstrate that the Caribbean Legion, its leaders, or the governments which have harbored and supported it, have in any way changed their hostile attitude toward the "dictatorships" as a result of COAS\* intervention in the recent Costa Rican-Nicaraguan disturbances. Although the governments of Cuba, Guatemala, and Costa Rica may from time to time and for various reasons pursue a less cooperative attitude toward the Legion, coincidence of policy should prevent a complete severance in the ties which at present bind them together.

Furthermore, so long as the Caribbean Legion or some of its more prominent individual members remain in physical possession of arms and matériel, the Legion, in one form or another will not be dissolved. Physically it may move its base of operations from one to another of the Latin American countries, and its cadre may be scattered among the several "democracies" of the area, but this development would

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\* Council of the Organization of American States, formerly known as the Governing Board of the Pan American Union.

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not prevent its re-emergence at some future and more propitious time as a vigorous and active force in Central American-Caribbean intergovernmental relationships.

The Caribbean Legion has no well-defined ideology, but is bound together by a common opposition to the highly personalized and authoritarian governments of Somoza and Trujillo. Given the power, however, there is no assurance in the case of some Legion members that they would refrain from many of the "dictatorial" practices they now oppose. Possibly the majority of members are inclined to believe in various principles of government now practiced in the US, Britain, France, or Cuba; yet within the group are also some Marxian socialists; conservative Catholics and active Masons; ex-Spanish Republicans and ex-members of the Franco regime in Spain; millionaires and paupers. The Figueres Government in Costa Rica which the Legion made possible has sponsored no radical philosophies nor un-American ideologies. It is improbable that a Legion-created government of Nicaragua would adopt such policies.

Admittedly the Legion fosters underlying concepts of change and is groping for new norms of authority and administration, but these concepts are indistinct and undefined. Individual opportunism is the prime motivation of the Legionnaires. The very lack of a definite program, however, probably accounts in large part for the acceptance of the Legion in an area where the only militant opposition is to be found among those who either are against change in existing political arrangements or generally object to the use of force as an instrument of international policy.

No matter what disturbances the Caribbean Legion may foment in the future, they will not, of course, affect the basic concept of Hemisphere defense and hence will have no direct bearing on US-Soviet rivalry. The Legion's power, however, to modify and influence internal affairs and international relationships in the Caribbean cannot be overlooked. (For details on the organization and development of the Caribbean Legion see Appendix.)

## APPENDIX

## ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN LEGION

The Caribbean Legion was formed as such during March 1948. Its leaders, who were dissidents and exiles from various of the Central American-Caribbean "dictatorships," joined with José Figueres (now Provisional President of Costa Rica) and assisted him to such an extent that he was able to overthrow the pro-Somoza, Calderón-dominated, government.

Many of the Legion's leaders; much of its matériel, and some of its men, however, were part of the original attempted invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1947—otherwise known as the Cayo Confites expedition. This organized, well-equipped and integrated revolutionary plot was originally conceived by political exiles from the Dominican Republic; but was able to reach such proportions as a result of the informal agreement between President Arévalo of Guatemala; Rómulo Betancourt (then President of Venezuela); the then Minister of Labor and now President Prío, and former Minister of Education Alemán of Cuba; and political exiles from the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Honduras. The aim of the agreement was the "reinstatement of popular sovereignty in the Caribbean area," and much was made of the "Bolivarian mission" of the Legion. From the political standpoint, the goal of the "pact" was simply the destruction of the existing governments of the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and their replacement by friendly governments.

In preparation for invasion of the Dominican Republic, several landing craft, a dozen or more aircraft, an estimated 1,200 men supplied with adequate small arms, rifles, grenades, machine guns, and aerial bombs, were gathered on Cuban territory. Immediately prior to the expedition's projected departure for the Dominican Republic, however, the Cuban Government—prominent members of which had been openly aiding and abetting the Legion's activities—suppressed it, their reasons being internal political maneuvers and US pressure. The Legion's leaders subsequently substituted Nicaragua in place of the Dominican Republic as the primary target. In order that it might be nearer the target, the matériel was shipped and flown to Guatemala and then transshipped to Costa Rica, where it was first used in the Figueres-led civil war.

The Legion considered its Costa Rican operations as part of its projected Nicaraguan campaign and a preliminary to it. Two immediate objectives were thus attained: the Somoza Government was weakened by the substitution of a hostile for a friendly neighboring government on its southern border, and the amount of equipment available for the ultimate Nicaraguan campaign was increased. In order to obtain the Legion's support, present Provisional President Figueres had apparently agreed to give the Legion, at the close of the civil disturbances, twice the amount of equipment it lent him for arming his Costa Rican, as distinguished from his Caribbean Legion supporters.

At the close of the Costa Rican fighting the Legion was at its highest point of power, prestige, and influence. Its successful attack on Puerto Limón confirmed its

military prowess and enhanced throughout Central America its military reputation; the rifles, submachine guns, and grenades it was able to deliver to Figueres during the civil disturbances confirmed its ability to supply arms and to deliver them where and when they were needed; its superiority in weapons and fighting men over that of the new Figueres government assured it the ability to enforce its demands on the latter—namely that it be repaid twice the amount of arms it had loaned Figueres and that its personnel be housed and fed at Costa Rican Government expense until the debt had been paid. The personal intimacy of its leaders with the Presidents of Guatemala, Cuba, and Costa Rica gave it a voice in the area foreign policies of those countries; and its refusal to concern itself with the domestic affairs of Costa Rica, despite the fact that it was in a position to do so, reassured many who suspected the Legion's social-revolutionary intents.

The burst of optimism in revolutionary circles which followed the successful termination of the Costa Rican disturbances, was soon dissipated, however, by disagreements among the legionnaires. Divisions developed over the formulation of plans for the campaign against Nicaragua, especially within the so-called "Junta Revolucionaria Unificada de Nicaragua", a subsidiary and largely theoretical organization of the Legion striving for leadership of the projected attack. Rival factions of Nicaraguan exiles whose divisions reflected traditional internal political distinctions each contended for leadership of the Junta and for the support of Presidents Arévalo and Figueres.

In Costa Rica the rivalries eventually narrowed down to two contending groups. One led by Rosendo Argüello, Jr., consisted of about 200 armed men who were undergoing daily training and comprised the liberal and more radical elements among the Nicaraguan exiles. This group, variously called the "Chendos" or the "Puros", was superior in training, discipline, and physical condition to the rival group of about 100 men led by Miguel Ramírez who were, for the most part, conservative Nicaraguan exiles. Provisional President Figueres of Costa Rica supported the Argüello group, and President Arévalo of Guatemala supported the Ramírez group.

After much haggling, many conferences among the contenders, and high Costa Rican, Cuban, and Guatemalan government officials, Rosendo Argüello, Jr. was chosen on 17 October 1948 to act as "Commander in Chief" of the Nicaraguan Army of Liberation, with Miguel Ramírez as Chief of Staff "with all the functions and inherent attributes of such a position." The general staff was composed of eleven officers, six of whom (a majority) were Nicaraguan citizens, the others being Dominicans, Hondurans, and Cubans. Essentially the united group consisted of an officer cadre; large numbers of enlisted men were not trained.

The agreement also defined clearly and succinctly the relationship between the "Nicaraguan Army of Liberation" (the united Argüello-Ramírez group in Costa Rica) and Legionnaires in Guatemala, under the command of General Rodríguez, a Dominican exile and original founder of the Legion.

The Dominicans under Rodríguez were permitted to organize their own separate revolutionary force in Guatemala which, it was envisaged, would take full part in the attack on Nicaragua and would then, when the "Nicaraguan Army of Liberation" became the government of Nicaragua, become the Caribbean Legion for the eventual



attack on the Dominican Republic. In exchange for this support, the Argüello-Ramírez group promised that if and when it obtained control of Nicaragua, it would assist the Rodríguez group by supplying it with Nicaraguan air, sea, and land bases; ammunition and weapons; air power, and money.

Immediately after the agreement was signed in October, preparations went ahead for the attack on Nicaragua. Headquarters were established by the Rodríguez group in a house near the Government Palace of Guatemala and located in such a position as to be within rifle shot of a Guatemalan Army cuartel (for President Arévalo was determined that he should not, like Figueres, be subject to pressure from the armed body which he had invited into his country). General Rodríguez was in frequent personal contact with President Arévalo who, in all important decisions concerning the Legion, insisted that his Minister of War Arbenz and the Chief of the Armed Forces Arana be associated with him. A general staff consisting of six Dominicans, two Hondurans, one Nicaraguan and two Cubans was organized; and a skeleton organization of approximately 200 consolidated. Precise armed strength is undetermined, but is believed to include two 2-inch cannon, 35 machine guns, 80 submachine guns, 800 grenades, and 780 rifles. Guatemalan Army, Cuban Army, and commercial (i.e., TACA) aircraft were for all practical purposes made available to transport the men and matériel of the Legion to any designated Central American or Caribbean point, and a particular airport in Guatemala was designated for use by the Legion. President Prío of Cuba possibly promised to give the Legion, once the Nicaraguan attack got under way, such matériel as he still held from that confiscated during the Cayo Confites incident. This matériel included 2,000 grenades, 200,000 cartridges, 600 rifles, 32 machine guns, aerial bombs, boats, planes, and twelve bazookas. It was reported that officials of the Argentine Government approached some of the Legion officials with a view to holding discussions on the question of future Argentine support but that the Legion officials declined to discuss the matter lest ties with Perón arouse further anti-Legion feeling within the US Government.

Meanwhile, and despite the October agreement, disunity within the Legion continued, especially within the Argüello-Ramírez unit based in Costa Rica. The Costa Rican Government, by virtue of arms purchases in the US, was apparently able to pay off the Legion's Costa Rican-based unit and return to it all borrowed arms. Furthermore, from mid-November Provisional President Figueres' official attitude toward the Legion appears to have undergone a perceptible change, and the Costa Rican Government was no longer as cooperative toward the Legion as it had been. Rivalry within the Argüello-Ramírez group broke out afresh, and Rodríguez in Guatemala recalled some Legion matériel and personnel from Costa Rica.

In addition, the Legion appears to have developed a greater respect for the loyalty of the Nicaraguan *Guardia Nacional* to its chief, Somoza. The loyalty—or, more properly, the lack of loyalty—of the *Guardia* has always been a crucial factor in the Legion's anti-Somoza plans, for all responsible Legion members realize that, despite the considerable matériel and personnel they have gathered, such a campaign as they might be able to launch against Somoza could not succeed unless at least a part of the *Guardia Nacional*, proved disloyal under pressure, and deserted. This is especially true

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In view of reported Legion strategy which calls for an initial air invasion of Nicaragua with landings at the airfields of the Siuna and Bonanza mines where large numbers of workers and *Guardia* garrisons are reported to be anti-Somoza.

This was the situation up to Friday, 10 December 1948, when an organized group of Costa Rican exiles—numbers and armament undetermined—aided and abetted by Somoza and the army which he commands, crossed the frontier from Nicaraguan territory into Guanacaste province, Costa Rica. During the early hours of this invasion (one of the causes of which was the presence of the Caribbean Legion in Costa Rica and Guatemala, and Somoza's fear of it) the Costa Rican Government made a formal agreement with the Argüello-led Legion subsidiary. Although the precise terms of the agreement are unknown, there are strong indications that Provisional President Figueres again promised future support for the Legion's aim of destroying the Somoza regime in exchange for help in suppressing the Somoza-supported revolutionary incursions against him. Specifically, individual Legion members were permitted to enlist in the Costa Rican Army. The General Staff of the Legion, which was to remain intact, was not to direct a counterattack in Nicaragua unless the invading forces had enough support from Somoza to place the outcome in doubt. This backing did not prove sufficiently strong and, as a consequence, the Legion as such did not engage in anti-Somoza moves.

The speed with which the Council of Organization of American States intervened in the disturbances was possibly a factor in deterring the Legion and the Figueres Government from precipitate action against Somoza. This and internal difficulties within Guatemala checked the Arévalo Government. On 24 December, the Council of Organization of American States advised the Costa Rican Government to remove from its territory "groups of nationals or foreign military organizations" (i.e. the Caribbean Legion) conspiring against the security of Nicaragua and of other sister Republics.

At present, although the Legion has outwardly become less active, its operational position remains comparable to what it has been for the past several months. Officers, men, and matériel are located in both Guatemala and Costa Rica. It still constitutes a sufficient force to be a significant factor in the calculations of the Caribbean governments relating to local foreign policy, especially in the matter of rivalry between the "dictatorships" and the "democracies." Presidents Prío of Cuba, Arévalo of Guatemala, and Figueres of Costa Rica remain favorably disposed toward it and willing to use it as an instrument of public policy. There is evidence that Legion friends and supporters in Cuba are about to launch an active propaganda campaign on behalf of its aims and aspirations.

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ENCLOSURE A

DISSENT OF THE INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION, DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The intelligence organization of the Department of State does not concur in subject report in the following respects:

We believe that the report places too much emphasis upon the political significance of the Legion as an organization because (a) in recent weeks the strength of the Legion appears to have materially declined and (b) the Legion is not put entirely in its proper perspective with reference to the political conditions of the area. With reference to the latter the intelligence organization of the Department believes that the Legion in itself is of less significance than the fact that it had its origin in the increased dissatisfaction in the area with traditional methods of government and in the fairly widespread desire for the development of political institutions along more progressive lines. Specifically, it is felt that insufficient emphasis has been placed upon the fact that the Legion found it possible to organize partly because of intense feeling existing both in and out of the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua against the repressive regimes of Trujillo and Somoza. The conflict which has made the Legion possible is a more persistent factor in the political relationships of the area than the Legion itself which might at any time fall apart as an organization, but which would in such case likely be succeeded in time by some other and possibly similar instrument of agitation and force as long as the self-seeking dictatorships remain.

We believe that El Salvador should be omitted from any mention in connection with the tendency that has existed to form two rival and competing blocks of power in the area.

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